

"SERGEI PROKOFIEV'S SIXTH PIANO SONATA"

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Master of Music in Applied-Music (Piano)







THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SERGEI PROKOFIEV'S

SIXTH PIANO SONATA

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Department of Music, for acceptance, a paper entitled "Sergei Prokofiev's Sixth Piano Sonata," submitted by Laurie Fumagalli in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Applied Music (Piano).

  
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## CHAPTER I

### THE PIANO MUSIC OF SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev's genius (1891-1953) encompassed all genres, but it is the piano works which occupy a central position in his compositional output and span his entire creative career. From the very beginning of his career, his style and musical output was closely linked with his activity as a pianist. At the age of five, he began to compose short pieces, waltzes, marches, and rondos, which continued to form a notable part of his music throughout the rest of his career. During his years at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and during the next two decades, from 1915-1935, when he was active as a touring concert pianist in Europe and America, the majority of his compositions were for keyboard. Only in the later years, after his return to Russia, did the piano play a less important role. Even then in the piano solo medium he wrote the last piano sonatas and a series of gebrauchsmusik works intended for the student.

Prokofiev was one of the greatest Russian virtuosos of his time. His brilliantly individual style of playing, with its clean finger technique, steel-like touch, astonishing technique in leaps, staccato, and an exceptional freedom of wrist



movement, bore the stamp of the Esipova-Leschetizky school. Some of these traits, common to Scarlatti's piano style, found their ultimate and almost grotesque expression in Prokofiev's music and playing. He impressed audiences with his rhythmic, driving, at times percussive keyboard sound, causing critics and observers to dwell on the overwhelming dynamism of his performance. His reputation as an "enfant terrible" was due as much to his flamboyant keyboard approach as to the music itself. Specific features of Prokofiev the pianist are so intricately bound up with those of Prokofiev the composer, that it is difficult to separate the two.

Energy, steel rhythm, powerful tone, a remarkable ability to convey true lyricism and an avoidance of over-refinement of intimacy are qualities of his music and are the principle traits of his pianism. His technique was truly phenomenal and his pianoforte music presents difficulties of an almost transcendental nature to the performer.<sup>1</sup>

Rhythmic precision and vigorous movement constitute some of the chief characteristic elements of Prokofiev's compositional and pianistic style. In many of the piano works this style predominates. Notable examples are the Etudes, Op. 2, the Toccata, Op. 11, the Suggestion Diabolique, Op. 4, the Sarcasms, Op. 17, and the Sixth and Seventh Piano Sonatas. The early Toccata is a formidable study in double notes, leaps and chords. The passage work demands a high degree of articulation and strength. Bite and power are features of both the pianistic and stylistic approach. The tempestuous,

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<sup>1</sup>William W. Austin, Music in the 20th Century (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), p. 466.



defiant Prokofiev could become poetic and moving. His playing at times revealed a remarkable simplicity, containing not a single superfluous gesture or a single exaggerated expression. Examples of his piano music which exhibits these characteristics are the Episodes, Op. 12, Sonatas Nos. 4, 5, 8, and 9, the Tales of an Old Grandmother, Op. 31, and the Music for Children, Op. 65.

Because of his affinity for the instrument, it became his habit to compose at the piano. In this way, it served as a type of proving ground to test the validity of his compositional procedures.

Pianistically, the demands of Prokofiev's piano music vary. There is music at all levels of difficulty since he addressed himself to children as well as the virtuoso. Octaves as well as demanding passage playing are predominant features of the more extended works, with the passages asking for a high degree of articulation, staccato, and power. The children's pieces on the other hand are very moderate in their technical demands.

The following enumeration of works will briefly outline the major piano solo works of Sergei Prokofiev:

Prokofiev's earliest compositions were short character pieces entitled "Ditties". From 1902-1906, five series of these miniatures were written amounting to sixty pieces in all. Through these compositions it is possible to trace his development from childish imitation to completely original composition, but space limitations preclude showing this.





The first group of published solo piano works are associated with Prokofiev's student years, from 1906-1914. Included within this group are the first four sonatas and the shorter pieces through Op. 12.

<u>Opus</u>		<u>Publication</u>	<u>Premiere</u>	
1	Sonata in F minor	1909	Mar 6/1910,	S. Prokofiev
2	Four Etudes	1909	Mar 6/1910,	"
3	Four Pieces	1911	Apr 10/1911,	"
4	Four Pieces	1910-12	Dec 31/1908,	"
11	Toccata	1912	Dec 10/1916,	"
12	Ten Pieces	1913	Feb 5/1914,	"
14	Sonata in D minor	1912	Feb 5/1914,	"
28	Sonata in A minor	1917	Apr 15/1918,	"
29	Sonata in C minor	1917	Apr 17/1918,	"

The First Sonata, Op. 1 has late romantic "sturm und drang" affinities; it is Brahmsian in texture and Russian in sentiment. The vigour, however, is already recognizably Prokofievian. The Suggestion Diabolique of Op. 4 is the piece which established Prokofiev's reputation as a composer of "wild grotesquerie". The diabolism of the piece is created through the use of discordant harmonies and a semi-percussive use of the piano. Its main theme, an elegant and energetic melody over a compulsively rhythmic bass, illustrates what was to be one of Prokofiev's chief contributions to music, a combination of forcefulness and melodic invention with exhilarating rhythms. The Toccata, Op. 11 is similar to this work. It is in effect a "perpetuum mobile" which features repeated chord and notes, sixteenth-note motion and



sliding chromatic figures. The Episodes, Op. 12, is a set of more neo-classical pieces. It was revised from music written between 1906 and 1912 and suggests the composer of the Classical Symphony.

The Second Sonata, Op. 14, was one of young Prokofiev's finest achievements. It represents a great step forward from the stylistically immature First Sonata. Flexible rhythms, vigorous technical passages, and a ceaseless flow of contrasting images and moods endow the sonata with youthful exuberance and buoyancy. The piano texture is typically that of Mozart or Beethoven: two or three-part writing, non-legato, and sharply accentuated passages predominate. The four movements, though differing sharply in mood, are linked organically through a common conception and through common thematic material. The humour and lyricism of the sonata serve to emphasize the force of youth and the romantic impulses which predominate throughout.

Both sonatas nos. 3 and 4 are reworkings of material dating back to 1907 and 1908, but both are considered as belonging to the year 1917, the year of the Revolution. Sonata No. 3, Op. 28 proved to be one of Prokofiev's finest piano compositions. A more dramatic approach characterizes this work. There is no mischievous taunting, but rather a powerful impetuosity which builds continuously throughout the one-movement work. In many ways it resembles the preceding sonata. It contains the same agitated triplet rhythms, wide leaps, strong accents, and energetic passage work alternating with



cantilena figures. Unlike the fiery third sonata, Sonata No. 4, Op. 29 is of a more restrained nature. The melody and harmony is austere. The part-writing, moving counter-melodies, complex suspensions, and abrupt cadences reveal the composer's familiar style, however. Notable is the clarity, classical textures and Alberti bass which predominate throughout the sonata, illustrating Prokofiev's classical affinities.

In 1918, Prokofiev left revolutionary Russia to concertize in the United States and Europe. During this relatively short period (1919-1924) he accumulated a large solo piano repertoire. Included within this period are two substantial sets of piano pieces, two smaller sets and one sonata.

<u>Opus</u>		<u>Publication</u>	<u>Premiere</u>	
17	Sarcasms	1912-14	Dec 10/1916,	S. Prokofiev
22	Fugitive Visions	1915-17	Apr 15/1918,	"
31	Tales of an Old Grandmother	1918	Jan 7/1919,	"
32	Four Pieces	1918	Jan 7/1919,	"
38	Sonata in C major	1923	Mar 9/1924,	"

The Suggestion Diabolique paved the way for the exploration of sinister moods using biting pianistic textures and dissonance. This grotesque aspect of Prokofiev's art constitutes one of the most characteristic elements of his style. The Sarcasms, Op. 17, form a kind of apotheosis of this piano style, ranking as the most dissonant and most experimental of all of Prokofiev's piano works. Mischief and devilish sarcasm predominate. While the odd-numbered pieces abound in violent, dynamic emotions, teasing images and rhythmic exaggeration,



the even-numbered ones contain a quiet, almost eerie atmosphere. The set not only represents anarchical extremes of style but also expresses the young composer's mockery of life and art. The second, larger piano cycle of this period is the Visions Fugitive, Op. 22. In the spring of 1917, he added nine pieces to the already existing eleven composed in 1915-16 to form the complete cycle. The twenty pieces vary widely in mood and imagery and are arranged in an alternating sequence of lyrical with dramatic or dance-like. Prokofiev seemed to be experimenting with rhythm, harmony and piano texture in these pieces. A variety of moods, unexpected harmonic twists juxtaposed with extremely simple diatonic passages, sudden shifting within a piece from sparkling humor to the tenderest lyricism, hostile rhythmic force and the exploitation of novel piano textures are notable features of this cycle. The qualities of clarity and tranquility which were the main characteristics of Op. 31 and Op. 32, predominate also in the Fifth Piano Sonata, Op. 38 of 1923. This work was considerably revised at the end of the composer's life in 1953 and reissued as Op. 135. The 1923 version is notable for its maximum simplicity and classical affinity - Haydnesque in many ways and reminiscent of the Classical Symphony.

The gebrauchsmusik period of Prokofiev's life is often associated with his return to Soviet Russia, (1936), but in fact, the simplification of his style began from the time of his departure from Russia. After a period of extensive





travel and concertizing, Prokofiev settled in Paris and worked on larger projects (i.e. opera, symphonies, etc.). The piano no longer occupied a central role.

The earlier piano works were written for Prokofiev's own use as a performer. He was the unsurpassed interpreter of his own compositions and premiered all of his piano works except the last two sonatas. Even though these early works were not inspired by Prokofiev's need for concert material, their relative virtuosity and dynamism made them effective concert repertoire. The works of the Russian period tend to be addressed to the student and consequently feature a much simpler style and a much simpler technical approach.

<u>Opus</u>		<u>Publication</u>	<u>Premiere</u>
45	Chose en soi	1928	Jan 6/1930, S. Prokofiev
52	Six Pieces	1930-31	May 27/1932, "
59	Three Pieces	1934	?, "
54	Two Sonatinas	1931-32	Apr 17/1932, "
65	Music for Children	1935	Apr 11/1936, "

The latent classicism in his musical thinking and the evolution of his creative ideas toward simplicity and clarity made it possible for him to return to the Soviet Union and accept the requirements of life as a Soviet artist without much compromise.

Prokofiev had ceased appearing as a pianist in public and because of the war had been forced to retreat to a series of locales far from Moscow and Leningrad. The bulk of the piano music written in this period is to be found in the last four piano sonatas written between 1939 and 1947.



Opus	Publication	Premiere
82 Sonata in A major	1939-40	Apr 8/1940, Prokofiev
83 Sonata in B-flat major	1939-42	Jan 9/1943, Richter
84 Sonata in B-flat major	1939-44	Dec 30/1944, Gilels
103 Sonata in C major	1947	Apr 21/1951, Richter
135 Sonata in C major	1953	Feb 2/1954, Vedernikov

The Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Sonatas are sometimes referred to as the War Sonatas, more because of their time of composition than because of any programmatic content. Prokofiev had not worked on a piano sonata for sixteen years.

Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter is one of the biggest of the composer's works in any medium. This sonata and the Seventh depart from the prevailing tranquility of Prokofiev's later works. It is interesting for the unusual complexity of its content and the extreme sharpness of its contrasts. The musical images range from extreme harshness to delicate lyricism.

Sonata No. 7, Op. 83 is notable for its strident dissonances and nervous excitement. In harshness and fury this surpasses the Sixth Sonata, and is the most radically conceived of Prokofiev's piano sonatas. The first movement creates the impression of a fiendish scherzo, reminiscent of the driving passages in the Toccata. The restless pattern of the melody, the persistence of ostinato bass figures and a dissonant harmonic texture create the diabolic effect. Everything in the second movement is in direct contrast to the preceding movement. The lyricism, the rich harmonic texture and the bright tonality of E major provides contrasts to the first movement. This slow movement has a triadic lushness that appears only



occasionally in Prokofiev. The third movement is the most impressive of all and one of the most dynamic movements by a composer famous for his dynamic piano style. Here, melody is overwhelmed by an elemental rhythm and heavy, dissonant chords.

Like the Sixth and Seventh Sonatas, Sonata No. 8, Op. 84 was sketched in 1939. The actual composition absorbed Prokofiev during the last summer of the war, along with the piano score of the Fifth Symphony and the orchestration of Cinderella. The sonata does abound in complexities not found in the earlier piano works, yet its structure is fundamentally classical. This sonata is one of Prokofiev's finest virtuoso piano works. It abounds in variety: alongside swift passages and contemplative passages, both typical of Prokofiev's instrumental works, there are themes of an almost epic character, suggesting a hidden program. These images bear a resemblance to some of the operatic themes and are new to Prokofiev's instrumental music. The first movement of the sonata contains two themes, both with operatic affinities. One must remember his interest in opera at this time. The fragmentary nature of the second theme closely aligns this passage with a typical recitative passage from a Prokofiev opera.



Example 1. Sonata No. 8, Op. 83, first movement, ms. 35-38.



It is not unlikely that themes of this sort grew out of the experience Prokofiev gained while working on symphonic suites from his operatic music. The second movement is more traditional: a lyrical, dance-like miniature. The opening of the Finale is reminiscent of Prokofiev's early piano compositions with its spirited themes. This movement recalls music of the Op. 2 Etudes and the finales of the second and fourth sonatas. Typical Prokofievian virtuosic devices of perle runs, double notes, toccata-like passages, leaps and sharp staccato abound in the score. The breadth and depth of this sonata far surpasses any and all of the other sonatas.

The Ninth Sonata, Op. 103 in C major was Prokofiev's last completed piano composition. Again, as in the Eighth Sonata, this work is characterized by a certain classical lightness and emotional serenity. This sonata contains neither violent outbursts nor complicated technical effects, instead intimate lyricism is mingled with playful fantasy. One senses a relationship between its musical material and that of the operas and ballets of the 1940's, such as the War and Peace and Cinderella. It is in four movements; movements one and three are predominately lyrical and the second and fourth are lively and dance-like. The first movement, like all the others, is miniature in form, slightly developed and devoid of dramatic conflicts. Despite the similiarity to Prokofiev's earlier works, the refined harmonic texture and chromatically interweaving lines are typical of his later writing. The second





movement is constructed like a scherzo: an impetuous running theme gives way to a soft, graceful dance reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet. In the third movement a song-like melody predominates, alternating with a vivacious theme. The finale is the gayest movement of all and is, as in most of Prokofiev's finales, in the form of a rondo-sonata. This sonata contains many interesting and novel coloristic effects. Thematic links occur between the movements, the main themes of the following movements appear. The Ninth Sonata failed to achieve acceptance and remained unpublished for eight years, and even now seldom appears on concert programs. It provides, however, a suitable close to the remarkable series of sonatas which, together with the other piano music, constitute the most substantial corpus of keyboard literature by any twentieth-century composer.



## CHAPTER II

### A STUDY OF THE SIXTH PIANO SONATA

Prokofiev's joyous, vigorous, intensely musical personality is expressed in every opus, and in none more strikingly than the Sixth Sonata.<sup>2</sup>

The Sixth Piano Sonata, Op. 82, in A major, completed on February 1, 1940, was premiered by Sergei Prokofiev on a Moscow Public Radio Broadcast on April 8th of the same year. Sviatoslav Richter, a staunch exponent of Prokofiev's music, performed the sonata in public in November of 1940. Critics in Soviet Russia, dedicated to the cult of "healthy music for the masses", could find little in it except unpleasantness and described the first movement as "brutal, soulless, cruel, alarmingly harsh, containing sinister mockery with terrible forces at work".<sup>3</sup>

Not all responses from the musical community were negative. Miaskovsky commented on the "power and daring" of the sonata and suggested the style was a mixture of the old and new Prokofiev. This four-movement work does indeed contain certain features of Prokofiev's earlier writing. Once again the composer's penchant for piano virtuosity is apparent; the "barbaric" harmonies and rigid rhythms of the first movement are suggestive of many of Prokofiev's early works, in particular the Sarcasms and the Toccata. The engaging

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<sup>2</sup>Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson, The Prodigal Son. (London: Cassel & Co., 1964), p. 191.  
<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 80.



gaiety of the second movement recalls some of the earlier dances, those of Op. 12 and Op. 32. The third movement, a lyrical nocturne in the "rhythm of a waltz" is reminiscent of the romantic passages of Romeo and Juliet. Again in the fourth movement, notable for its vigorous motion and its impetuous running passages, earlier compositional procedures are apparent; the light texture, similar to the style of Domenico Scarlatti, and the delightful, gay quality are distinctly familiar characteristics of the youthful Prokofiev. Juxtaposed with these youthful elements are characteristics associated with his mature style: refined harmonic texture, interweaving chromatic lines and intense lyricism. These extremes of style and the complexities and contrasts of mood contribute to the enigmatic quality of this sonata.

The irrepressible demons of Prokofiev's temperament which had raged so furiously in his earlier works, reappear in this sonata.<sup>4</sup>

The first movement (Allegro Moderato) clearly demonstrates this. From the movement's explosive opening are heard cruel, evil images, startling in their mechanical coarseness and diabolic sarcasm. The short motive in combination with a tritone hammering in the bass and an alternation of major and minor thirds in the treble voice creates a very percussive

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<sup>4</sup>Israel Nestyev, Prokofiev. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 320.



and brutal character, further delineated by the insistent repetition and the narrow range of the motive.



Example 2. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, first movement, ms. 1-4.

Chromaticism plays an important part in intensifying the emotional effect and occurs in the dramatically intense moments. In the ostinato passages, the tonal instability of chromaticism serves to intensify the gradual build-up of tension and volume. In the following example the displaced accents and the syncopation heighten the intensity created by the chromaticism. The accented whole-note chords placed in the very low and very high registers provide clusters of sound to increase even further the chaos of the passage. Hand crossings of this type are common to Prokofiev's pianistic style and are thought to be an influence of the hand-crossing techniques employed in the keyboard writing of Domenico Scarlatti.



Example 3. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, first movement, ms. 77-80.





A non-legato detached touch is required through much of the movement. This "secco" approach, predominating in much of Prokofiev's piano music creates an aggressive and deliberately harsh sound. The sharp accents, accentuated imitative entries, syncopations, "crescendi" from "mezzo-piano" to "forte" in half a measure and the sharply accented hand-crossings into the high registers contribute to the harsh, percussive nature of the following passage.



Example 4. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, first movement,  
ms. 98-103.

Various compositional and technical devices are used to create the mood of unrestrained fury at the climax of the development section. Both themes are subjected to substantial alteration and clash in harsh, polytonal passages. In all the piano sonatas, this technique serves to



dramatize the development section and to make the recapitulation even stronger. In this sonata various contrapuntal devices, such as thematic augmentation and imitation at the augmented fourth are employed. (Example 5, ms. 140-145) Vehement hammering ostinato figures in the bass and a persistent reiteration of the opening motive contribute to the overall complexity and restless mood of the passage. The use of such percussive piano devices as glissandi and blows of the fist, marked "col pugno", serve to intensify this mood without obscuring the thematic importance of the inner lines.

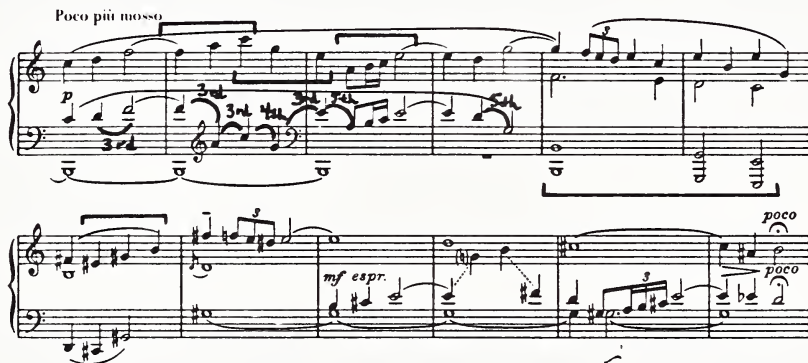
The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piano sonata. It consists of three systems of grand staves. The first system has a 'glissando' marking in the right hand. The second system is labeled '2nd theme' and includes a 'col pugno' (blow of the fist) marking in the right hand and an 'ostinato' (repeating) pattern in the left hand. The third system continues the themes with various musical notations including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 5. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, first movement, ms. 137-145.



Prokofiev's music can express not only frenzy and terror, but also tenderness and lyricism. His works almost invariably suggest cruel, evil images juxtaposed with moving, lyrical passages. This reflects his desire to extend the boundaries of musical expressiveness.

Prokofiev's melodic writing has the clarity and precision of classical music; each thematic idea is set forth concisely and rounded out with distinct cadences. As exemplified by the second theme of this movement, the well-defined melodic lines are constructed on eighteenth-century principles: a basis of major and minor triads and the intervals of the second, fourth, fifth and octave.



Example 6. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, first movement, ms. 40-48.

For all the outward "classicism", however, there are unexpected melodic twists and harmonic shifts immediately revealing Prokofiev's distinctly modern touch.

Characteristic of Prokofiev's compositional style, the majority of his themes are constructed on regular phrasing,



typically two four-bar measures, in accordance with classical principles. The preceding example clearly illustrates this point.

In Prokofiev's own analysis of the origins of his style, he traces his "classical line" to influences of his youth: his mother's devotion to Beethoven, the enthusiasm of his conducting teacher, Nikolai Tcherepnin, and his compositional lessons with Taneiev in counterpoint based on J.S. Bach. Once again, latent classicism is discernible in his predilection for eighteenth century forms. Prokofiev felt that these classical foundations gave him all the scope he needed for experimentation. The first movement clearly follows the basic outlines of sonata-allegro form (i.e. exposition, development, and recapitulation), but Prokofiev modifies the form to suit his own dramatic purposes, and provides contrasts within the movement, which are obviously inspired by sonata-allegro form.

After the demonic images of the first movement, the second movement's engaging gaiety and dance-like quality are a welcome change. As previously mentioned, this movement resembles Prokofiev's earlier dance movements, in particular the "Gavotte" of the Classical Symphony and the piano gavottes of Op. 12 and Op. 32. The rhythmic charm, harmonic coloring, dance-like character and the graceful melody create this resemblance to earlier dance movements.

Much of Prokofiev's music is tinged with humour. He in-





troduced many subtle and original nuances of musical humour, ranging from good-natured laughter to biting sarcasm. He referred to this "scherzoishness" as a deviation from lyricism, the most important "line" in his style. To Prokofiev, both lyricism and scherzoishness are personal traits, having no youthful or contemporary origins. Both are important features of this movement.

Throughout the second movement, one senses a deliberate caricaturing of the rhythmic and melodic rigidity of a march resulting in a gentle mockery of style and character. The elegant, well-defined quadruple meter appealed to Prokofiev. His caricaturing of this constant, and well-defined movement is seen in the irregularity of phrasing, in the weak-beat accents and in the abrupt, unpredictable pauses in the flow. In the opening section, the pattern of phrasing (three-measure, five-measure, three-measure, five-measure and four-measure) is not the regularity of phrasing one would expect in a march.

The melody line is often playfully exaggerated in its linear movement, (wide, angular leaps are introduced into step-wise motion). The melodic lines' large range, the repeated notes, the chromatic movement juxtaposed with large leaps are all characteristically Prokofievian. To this he adds rich harmony and rhythmic grace and vigor. The accompaniment to this passage participates in both the rhythmic and harmonic elements, supporting the tune with important strands as well as chords, (at times paralleling



the motion and at other times providing contrasting leaps to a static repeated note melody.) The chords, at times obscured by non-harmonic tones, are themselves often triadic. Like the melodic line, the linear movement of the accompaniment varies. Chromatic, step-wise movement, octave leaps and leaps beyond an octave are found. Leaps of more than an octave are typical of Prokofiev and are quite prevalent in his music. The "secco, non-legato" articulation required further emphasizes the mocking, light-hearted character.

The musical score is for the second movement of Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, by Sergei Prokofiev. It is in 2/2 time and the key of D major (two sharps). The tempo is marked 'Allegretto'. The score consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The second system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system features a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The fourth system concludes the excerpt with a piano (p) dynamic. The music is characterized by Prokofiev's signature style, including chromatic movement, octave leaps, and 'secco, non-legato' articulation.

Example 6. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, second movement, ms. 1-20.



As in any composition of Prokofiev's, abrupt contrasts in style and character are important features. Between the mocking, dance-like passages are sections exaggerated in their lyricism and expressive character. Notice here the legato touch required and the pungent interval of the major seventh in an otherwise chromatically moving line.



Example 7. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, second movement, ms. 21-25.

This is a typical technique of Prokofiev: a logical line broken by a sudden change of octave. Many instances can be found throughout his works and in particular in the dramatic works. The following passage taken from Romeo and Juliet is a case in point.



Example 8. "Romeo and Juliet" from Suite No. 1, Op. 64 ms. 41-45.

In the second section of this movement the mocking gestures have disappeared and have been displaced by a contemplative theme. In many of Prokofiev's later works, themes of a



meditative, austere character are found. These themes are generally characterized by a well-defined, measured rhythm with movement (often triadic) in parallel octaves. Notice also the relatively low tessitura of the pure, simple melody and the lack of any but the sparsest sort of harmonic support.



Example 9. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, second movement, ms. 93-96.

Further into the section, the melodic line takes on a different character. The mood becomes much more dramatic, as illustrated by the presence of an accompaniment, imitative entries and extremely large leaps suddenly appearing in a simple, classical pattern. Such sudden angular patterns and distortions create an exaggeration of the melodic material and are used to intensify the emotional import.









Example 10. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, second movement,  
ms. 104-117.

The tripartite form of this movement is skilfully combined with innovative variational techniques. From a technical point of view, the demands on the pianist are extreme; the left hand figuration is difficult to execute in one beat because of the leap of an eleventh, yet a vital rhythmic character must be maintained. The extremely large chords in the right hand, spanning at times a reach of a tenth, provide a pianistic challenge, especially when the leaps between the chords are often an octave apart. When juxtaposed, these technical devices, the rippling arpeggios in the left hand and the dry staccato chords of the upper voice, exaggerate the already mocking nature of the movement.



Example 11. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, second movement,  
ms. 33-35.

Many of Prokofiev's stylistic tendencies are a result of his deliberate rejection of tradition. His lyricism has



a completely different character from that of the Nineteenth century Romantics; he disliked the overwrought sentimentality and the sensuous emotionalism of the Romantic composers. Instead, Prokofiev preferred a more restrained, purified type of lyricism. In the following quote, Asafyev uses metaphor in an attempt to understand Prokofiev's lyricism:

I caught a glimpse of a secluded garden of lyricism with a spring a pure, bubbling water, cold and crystal clear, free of the scum of "isms".<sup>5</sup>

One of the most notable features of the third movement is such tender lyricism as Asafyev describes. An important characteristic of all of Prokofiev's lyricism is the very broad melodic range, extending from the middle registers to the upper, more delicate registers. The following example is a typical passage taken from the third movement. Notice the range of a fifteenth, extending from an e' to d". This theme also contains the typical Prokofievian device of frequent changes from wide leaps to subtle chromatic motion within a melodic line, as in Example 7, above.



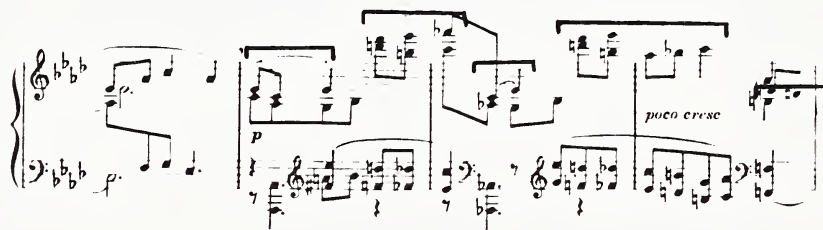
Example 12. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, third movement, ms. 1-3.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 470.



The melodic line encompasses the entire keyboard. Melodic crossovers between octaves are more common in Prokofiev's orchestral writing, but do appear in his instrumental works also. Novel colouring is created when such a device is used, as illustrated by the following passage. The two-octave displacement within the same line, from the middle-register sonorities to the subtle upper register colours, creates an arresting effect.



Example 13. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, third movement, ms. 59-62.

Prokofiev was no less an innovator in the realm of harmony. Perhaps his greatest achievement was the development of a profoundly original harmonic language. After the complex harmonies of the Romantic composers and the Impressionists, Prokofiev returned to the simplest and most basic tonalities (C major, D major, and A major). He gave a diatonic strength to the music while using all twelve tones. The roots of his development are traceable in the bitonality fashionable at the time, but he went beyond this. Prokofiev created a type of dissonance which abandoned key signatures, and one which was governed by purely linear part-writing considerations. The clear-cut tonalities are always combined



with striking transitional chords and distant modulations. Often the bright tonalities of C major is suddenly shifted to one or more distant tonal areas. For example, in the opening section of the third movement, B major seems to be the implied tonality. Tonal shifts a half-tone above or below are distinctive features of Prokofiev's themes. These "modulations" do not upset the original tonality but merely give it a varied color. Such modulations in combination with Prokofiev's inimitable melodic writing, produce a highly individual type of lyricism: tender, and at times enchanting.

Polyphony plays an important role in Prokofiev's harmonic style. In many of the later works, as melody assumed a more important role, polyphony became equally important. Prokofiev's polyphony is wholly individual. He does not adhere to the strict rule of Baroque or Classical counterpoint. In his music, elements of free, contrasting polyphony predominate over strict, imitative polyphony. The "basso ostinato" is an important polyphonic device. It is never employed as a sustained basis for variations. Instead, it has its roots in national tradition. The reiterated pattern of the bass serves to enhance the the harmony and to provide a continuous pulsation as support for the melody. The freedom and the mobility of the bass line and the use of ostinato figures are two important elements combining to produce Prokofiev's polyphonic style. Many of the dissonant harmonies are the result of the crossing of two or more horizontal lines. In contrast to the other movements of the sonata, the third has





an extremely polyphonic texture.



Example 14. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, third movement,  
ms. 99-104.

Chromatic interweaving lines and motivic fragments derived from the main theme create this contrapuntal texture. At times there are four independent lines placed simultaneously.

As with all Prokofiev's music, a dichotomy of style exists. Amid the complex, polyphonic texture of this movement is placed a more homophonic passage. Despite the ostinato figure and the inner weaving line, this passage is more homophonically conceived. Missing are the imitative entries and the complexity of the other passage. The melodic line is clearly defined with distinct cadences.







Example 15. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, third movement,  
ms. 46-51.

In the final movement (Vivace), the youthful Prokofiev is recognizable. This playful movement embodies many of Prokofiev's early characteristics. The light-hearted gaiety and the fast running passages are two elements which stand out in particular.

In contrast to the multiple-voiced texture of the preceding movement, this movement features a sparse, two-voiced texture. Again, the clarity and precision of classical writing becomes apparent.

Prokofiev's rejection of the rhythmic "anemia" of the Impressionists was reflected in his predilection for dynamic, well-defined rhythms. His rhythms are distinctive and varied. He disliked vascillating, refined rhythms; instead he returned to clear-cut, basic patterns. In using such techniques, he seems to be deliberately returning to the devices of the Classical period.

A majority of Prokofiev's themes are based on regular rhythmic pulsation. This means that the rhythmic movement consists of a reiteration of the main beats. These rhythmically regular themes often contain an alteration of a distinct pattern, without any obvious changes. This passage,



taken from the fourth movement, is an example.



Example 16. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, fourth movement, ms. 1-4.

This theme, with its regular pulsation of sixteenth-notes, conveys Prokofiev's characteristic element of motor-movement. The element of dominant energy, is strong in Prokofiev's music; he attached a great deal of importance to vigorous rhythm and swift tempos. The fourth movement is in effect a toccata, characterized by speed, machine-like precision and regularity of motion, which predominates throughout the movement. Many passages are almost etude-like in their continuity, the following for example.



Example 17. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, fourth movement, ms. 247-254.



This passage displays many characteristics common to D. Scarlatti, in particular the crossing of left hand over right and the transferring of figurations from one hand to the other without break.

There is a break in the display of pianist fireworks with the entry of a contemplative section at measure 184, when the mood is lifted out of the shallowness of pyrotechnics. This passage is interesting for its relationship to the first movement, as it is based on a leitmotif taken from the first theme of the first movement, a treatment common to Prokofiev. Three of the nine sonatas are cyclically treated in this way.



Example 18. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, fourth movement, ms. 184-195.

In the recapitulation, a dramatic change occurs at bar 369. The gaiety of the first theme is interrupted by a hammering in the bass. The signal cries of the first movement (bar nos. 377-378), and the descending chords of the development section (bar nos. 385-395) return. This introduces a feeling of nervousness into the otherwise light-





hearted nature of the finale and the carefree quality never returns. The return of the principle themes is accompanied with more intense, sinister overtones, with harsher harmonies and more dissonance and chromaticism. The running passages become angular in their motion and the range is extended, exploiting the extremely low ranges.

A Piu tranquillo section provides a respite before the final fury; again a passage characteristic of Prokofiev's style, with its crossing of accompaniment and melodic line, the transferring of the melodic line from treble to the bass voice, the large intervallic leaps (major and minor seventh, ninth, and tenths), and the sparse, two-part texture.



Example 19. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, fourth movement, ms.340-349.

The frenzied images of the first movement reappear in the coda. The harmonies are subjected to harsher treatment and the main motive of the first movement is heard. Glissandos



abound; an ostinato figure appears; there are hammering triplet figures throughout and the entire range of the keyboard is exploited. The frenzied images return and the sonata ends in the way in which it began.

The musical score consists of five systems of piano music. The first system shows a right-hand melody with triplets and a left-hand accompaniment. The second system features a prominent ostinato figure in the left hand. The third system includes a 'molto cresc.' marking and a 'ff' dynamic. The fourth system has a 'cresc.' marking and a 'ff' dynamic. The fifth system concludes the piece with a final chord in the right hand and a sustained bass line in the left hand. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time.

Example 20. Sonata No. 6, Op. 82, fourth movement, ms. 408-429.



In the forty-five years of Prokofiev's remarkable career as a composer, he wrote more than one hundred and thirty works, including eight operas, seven ballets, seven symphonies, nine instrumental concertos, more than thirty symphonic suites and vocal-symphonic works, fifteen sonatas for various instruments, several instrumental ensembles, numerous songs and a large number of piano works. Of the major composers of the twentieth century, Béla Bartók was the only composer who produced a comparable number of piano works. It is surely not coincidental that both composers were prominent piano virtuosi of their day.

Though Prokofiev began to compose at an early age, he did not follow in the steps of his predecessors. Instead he chose to follow his own creative impulses. He was an enemy of all that was dull, sentimental, and pretty in art. He demanded originality, inspiration and bold ideas.

Marked by virility, energy, purposefulness combined with a capacity for deep feeling, his music showed from the very first a commitment to war with Romanticism. Neither the refinement of Impressionism nor the temptations of Scriabin's style affected him. Prokofiev disliked the transcendental contemplativeness and sensuous refinement of these styles. His inexhaustible desire for novelty was balanced throughout his career against a thorough knowledge of classical music and classical forms. Prokofiev remained loyal to such time-honored forms as the sonata, sonata-rondo, and several three-part forms. The element of dominant energy was always very



strong, and his extraordinary rhythms, vigorous, clear-cut, sturdy as granite, almost "square", are invariably stimulating and refreshing. Basically diatonic, Prokofiev's harmonic idiom is nevertheless full of surprises, sharp dissonances and unexpected modulations. While lending a freshness and arresting quality to the music, this tends to give it a certain harshness. Yet, thanks to the extremely logical modal structure, a definite tonal core is preserved. Prokofiev's dissonances resembles neither the sound combinations of the atonal composers, nor the harmonic fabric of the polytonalists or atonalists like Schoenberg. His remarkable gift for melody places him apart from most modern composers, producing a surpassingly melodic line, dramatically intense, yet emotionally clear.

During his life, musical opinion **constantly** split into two sharply opposing camps: enthusiastic acclaim on the one hand and scandalized disapproval on the other. Concerts of his works usually evoked as much stormy applause as angry hissing. Prokofiev, however, paid little heed to the dictates of fashion or the reception his music was given. He always remained true to himself, whatever genre he worked in, yet he never lost a keen sense of the specific requirements of the given genre he chose.





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